DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
CENTRAL SCRUB EA
(PALS 41484)
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
OCALA NATIONAL FOREST
SEMINOLE AND LAKE GEORGE RANGER DISTRICTS
MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Central Scrub Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, which would implement the treatments listed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Proposed Actions

Row	Treatments			Acres	Comments
1	Harvest sand pine	After harvest, treat by roller drum choppers and/or prescribe burn	Seed sand pine	4,457	
2	Harvest sand pine	No treatments	Natural regeneration	751	In old WWII Bombing Range
3	Harvest sand pine	After harvest, prescribe burn	Manage as scrub oak	1,123	After treatments, most of these stands would be part of a regular prescribe burn unit and managed with fire
4	Prepare for seeding with roller drum choppers	Prescribe burn	Seed sand pine	54	Not enough sand pine present for a commercial harvest
	Miles	**Work Activities for Hydrology Restoration**			
5	0.7	Decommission part of FS Road 05 that goes through Big Prairie. Remove all surfacing and road material from out of prairie, revegetate as needed, remove culverts and other drainage structures, and block access as needed. **			
6	1.4	Construct new Level 3 road around Big Prairie to replace section decommissioned as described above. Work includes clearing and grubbing, surfacing, and constructing drainage as needed. ***			
7	2.1	Decommission part of FS Road 14-2.8 located within prairie area in vicinity of Long Pond. Block access and revegetate as needed.			
8	2.0	Construct new Level 2 road around Long Pond area to replace section of FS Road 14-2.8 as described above. Work includes clearing and grubbing and some grading.			

Row	Miles	**Road Work**-to support harvesting	Row	Miles	**Changes to Road System**
9	14.9	Road Reconstruction	11	65	Decommission Closed Roads
10	As needed	Road maintenance	12	15	Decommission Open to Public Roads*
			13	11	Add Roads to Forest System*
			14	14	Change Seasonal roads to Year round*
			15	0.7	Relocate OHV Trail
			16	5	Change designations on Forest System roads

*would affect Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), published annually.
** Forest Road 05 may be reconstructed instead of relocated with a better culvert system that would allow natural water flow on Big Prairie.
*** not applicable, if Forest Road 05 is reconstructed instead of relocated.

DECISION RATIONALE

Purpose	Need	How Proposed Alternative Meets Purpose and Need
Create new habitat for Florida scrub-jays (contributes to Forest Plan Objectives 9, p. 2-5 and 19, p. 2-6)	Present suitable habitat is below Forest Plan target level	Creates about 6,400 acres of scrub openings which will be suitable 2-3 years after implementation (Rows 1,2,3 and 4 in Table 1)
Modify existing road system (contributes to Forest Plan Objective 13, p. 2-6)	Improve road system by making changes based on public safety and resource protection	Decommission about 80 miles of road, add 11 miles to system (Changes to Road System in Table 1)
Hydrology Restoration at Big Prairie/Long Pond	Severe degradation of sinkhole rim from visitor use	Restore site by relocating road, removing impediments to natural water flow, checking erosion, and revegetating.

The Central Scrub EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based and is incorporated by reference into this Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact. The Environmental Assessment and maps of the proposed actions are available on the project website at http://goo.gl/P8EnfZ

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Ocala National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal through scoping and a public mailout in March 2013. The EA lists agencies and people consulted on pages 24-25. Comments received and Forest Service responses to those comments are in Appendix F of the EA.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Consistency with NFMA and the Forest Plan: The Forest Plan was prepared in accordance with the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1601-1610).
This decision is consistent with the Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for National Forests in Florida. This project is consistent with the Forest Plan's DFCs, forest-wide goals, and forest-wide objectives (LRMP, Chapter 2). The project is located within MA 8.2. MA goals, DFCs, and S&Gs apply to actions within this MA (LRMP, pp. 4-46 through 4-47). I find that the actions in the selected alternative are consistent with direction for MAs, and that the Forest Plan identifies these lands as suitable for timber production. The project is feasible, reasonable, and will apply management practices that meet the Forest Plan's overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

Vegetation Management Requirements (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(E)): This decision is consistent with management requirements associated with the accomplishment of Forest Plan goals and objectives. The following is a discussion of these requirements as it pertains to this project.

a. Soil, Slope, Or Other Watershed Conditions Not Irreversibly Damaged: The soils in the project area are low in fertility, clay, and organic matter; and are excessively drained, and not vulnerable to compaction. Except where slopes exceed 15%, these soils are generally not sensitive. Soil productivity is maintained by minimizing erosion, compaction, and rutting. Timber harvest and silvicultural treatments may cause short-term, localized soil disturbance and minute reductions in soil fertility, but will have a beneficial effect on nutrient cycling. Most disturbance would be limited to the vegetative litter. Minor soil movement may occur, but erosion out of the treated areas is not expected. The hydrology restoration to Big Prairie and Long Pond would improve watershed conditions in that area. Based on many years of experience with similar actions on similar soils, only minimal and localized effects are anticipated. Forest Plan S&Gs (FI-7, FI-8, WA-1, WA-2, and VG-14) ensure timber production from these lands without permanent impairment of site productivity or irreversible damage to soil and watershed conditions (EA, Soils and Water sections).

b. Lands Can Be Adequately Restocked Within Five Years After Final Regeneration Harvest: Regeneration will derive primarily from row seeding, but natural regeneration is also proposed. Regeneration monitoring on similar lands on the ONF has shown that with very few exceptions stands are restocked within five years of harvest. The field examinations of these stands selected for final harvest have confirmed that conditions are sufficiently similar to previously treated stands in the area such that it is likely that the results will be similar. There is a reasonable assurance that the stands in this project will be adequately restocked within five years.

c. Protection Is Provided For Streams, Stream Banks, Shorelines, Lakes, Wetlands, And Other Bodies Of Water From Detrimental Changes In Water Temperatures, Blockages Of Water Courses, And Deposits Of Sediment Where Harvests Are Not Likely To Seriously And Adversely Affect Water Conditions Or Fish Habitat: No streams, stream banks,

shorelines or lakes will be adversely affected by the project. Water resources will be protected by design feature 1 and the following S&Gs: FI-7, FI-8, WA-1, and WA-2. A comparison of soil loss and sediment yield rates with tolerable soil loss rates shows that soil loss from National Forests in Florida lands falls within acceptable limits (FEIS, p. 3-6).

d. Harvesting System Was Not Selected Primarily Because It Will Give The Greatest Dollar Return Or The Greatest Unit Output Of Timber: The choice of management practices was determined after consideration of many resource factors. These practices were chosen primarily because they will create openings in the sand pine scrub ecosystem to maintain viable populations of scrub-jays and other rare scrub species. They will also meet a Forest Plan objective of producing pine pulpwood. These practices are practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements, total costs of preparation, logging, and administration. In addition, these practices will reduce hazardous fuels and mimic the effects of fire on the scrub ecosystem within the scope of, and in support of, the National Fire Plan.

Timber Harvesting Management Requirements (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(i through v): This decision is consistent with the minimum specific timber harvesting management requirements for cutting methods designed to regenerate an even-aged stand of timber. The following is a discussion of these requirements as it pertains to this project.

a. Clearcutting Is Determined To Be The Optimum Method; And For Other Cutting Methods They Are Determined To Be Appropriate (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(i)): Based on experience and the site-specific analysis in the EA, I have determined that clearcutting is the optimum method to harvest 5,208 acres of even-aged sand pine stands listed in Table 1 above. Clearcutting is the optimum harvest method for sand pine, because:

- It will meet the purpose and need for action, and the LRMPs objectives and requirements.
- It provides early successional habitat that is essential for most scrub endemics, both plants and animals.
- It is the most successful harvest method to support both artificial and natural regeneration in the sand pine scrub.
- Artificial regeneration is more successful than natural regeneration due to the closed nature of sand pine cones, and the limited season that seedlings can germinate and survive the high soil surface temperatures of the scrub environment. Prescribe burning consumes woody debris and reduces the density of woody shrubs allowing better growth of other non-woody species and sand pine. It simulates the same type of disturbance that naturally occurred on these sites from infrequent catastrophic wildfires, although prescribed fire produces a much cooler fire.

b. Interdisciplinary Review Has Been Completed And The Potential Environmental, Biological, Aesthetic, Engineering, And Economic Impacts On Each Advertised Sale Area Have Been Assessed, As Well As The Consistency Of The Sale With The Multiple Use Of The General Area (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(ii)): See the list of Interdisciplinary Team members who participated in and reviewed this project and its analysis (EA, p. 24), and the

Environmental Consequences section of the EA. This project was designed to be consistent with the LRMP direction for MA 8.2. See the Forest Plan Consistency discussion above.

c. Cut Blocks, Patches, Or Strips Are Shaped And Blended To The Extent Practicable With The Natural Terrain (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(iii)): The stand shapes were designed to blend with the natural terrain where possible while meeting objectives for providing suitable scrub-jay habitat. They meet the visual quality objectives of the specific areas.

d. Maximum Size Limits For Areas To Be Cut In One Harvest Operation Have Not Been Exceeded (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(iv)): Harvesting designed to regenerate even-aged stands of sand pine scrub in MA 8.2 on the ONF cannot exceed 800 acres, including the acreage of adjacent openings. This project will not exceed that limit.

e. Timber Cuts Will Be Carried Out In A Manner Consistent With The Protection Of Soil, Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, And Esthetic Resources, And The Regeneration Of The Timber Resource (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(v)): This project is expected to provide the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired species, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields as identified in the environmental analysis. (EA, Environmental Consequences section)

f. Even-Aged Stands Of Trees Scheduled For Regeneration Harvest Generally Have Reached Culmination Of Mean Annual Increment (CMAI) Of Growth (16 U.S.C. 1604 (m)(1)): NFMA requires that even-aged stands scheduled for regeneration harvest have generally reached culmination of mean annual increment of growth. This requirement applies to stands identified as suitable for timber harvest. All of the stands to be regenerated have reached CMAI.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action as well as the severity of effects.

CONTEXT

As analyzed in the EA, the effects of this project have social, environmental, spatial, and temporal dimensions.

- This is not a major action within the context of the Forest Plan, the historic level of management activity for the project area, and the amount of management activity needed to meet the purpose and need for action (EA, Environmental Consequences section).

- The types of activities that will be implemented are similar to activities that have occurred in the past in this area or areas similar to it. The amount of management activity is similar to historic levels of activity in this area (EA, Environmental Consequences section).

- The physical and biological effects will usually be limited to the project area and immediately adjacent areas. However, for some resources the spatial boundary was expanded for the effects analysis (EA, as well as the severity of effects. section).

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety**. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because any hazards are mitigated by project design criteria (12 and 13) in section 2.3, timber sale and contract specifications for safety, and state traffic laws. (See EA page 21,22)
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area because there are no unique characteristics of the geographical area that will be significantly affected by the selected actions. Wetlands will be protected by project design criteria 1. S&G WA-1 incorporates State of Florida Best Management Practices (BMPs) to prevent soil erosion and sedimentation (EA, Soils and Water sections).
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** Based on consultation with others, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The effects of this project involve well-quantified risk. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Similar projects have been completed with results well within anticipated effects (EA, Environmental Consequences section, pages 12-21).
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because commonly accepted techniques will be employed in the implementation of this project. Additionally, this decision to implement activities within the project area does not commit us to actions on lands outside the project area. (See EA, Table 2, pages 12-13)

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. There are no known significant cumulative effects between this project and other projects implemented or planned within the project area or adjacent areas. All known connected actions associated with the selected activities which are likely to occur in the reasonably foreseeable future have been identified in the EA. All anticipated direct, indirect, and cumulative effects have been disclosed (EA, Environmental Consequences section, pages 12-21).

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** There will be no significant effects on scientific, cultural or historical resources. During the heritage resource survey, heritage resources sites were identified. Heritage resources identified and deemed significant enough for potential inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places would be avoided during project implementation. Findings are located in FY-14 Heritage Resources Status Report 1, Lake George and Seminole Ranger Districts, Ocala NF, Accession's # SEMF00443 AND LKGF00454, which was prepared by the Ocala NF Archeologist and is administratively confidential. The State Historic Preservation Officer and the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Seminole Tribe of Florida reviewed the heritage resources report and concurred with the findings (DHR Project File No. 2014-0748, Addendum to: Management Summary FY-14 Heritage Resources Status Report 1, Lake George and Seminole Ranger Districts, Ocala NF, Accession's # SEMF00443 AND LKGF00454).

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The Biological Assessment recognized the possibility that the project activities could negatively affect individuals of the following species: sand skink, Eastern indigo snake, Florida bonamia, scrub buckwheat, and Lewton's polygala However, most of the project activities are in habitats not suitable for any of these species and the potential impacts to individuals would have minimal effects on the overall population. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concurred with our effects determination in the Biological Assessment (refer to correspondence on February 1, 2013 FWS Log No. 41910-2014-0082) and noted that "All of the proposed actions identified for the Central Scrub Project are consistent with, and do not exceed the scope of activities within the revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the National Forest in Florida and subsequent amendments (as well as other step down documents; i.e. the 2009 Sand Pine/Scrub Ecosystem landscape Scale Assessment)." The FWS concluded that "Any potential incidental take of the sand skink and Eastern indigo snake would not exceed the incidental take authorized by the (Service's) December 18, 1998 Biological Opinion for the LRMP. We further believe that any incidental take resulting from this project will not be significant." Based on the analysis and findings in

the Biological Assessment and concurrence from the FWS, I have determined that the risk and potential consequences of adverse effects to endangered or threatened species from the approved activities is not significant.

10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA and in this Decision Notice. The action is consistent with the National Forests in Florida Land and Resource Management Plan. (See EA pages 4-5 and Appendix D)

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Objection Opportunities

This decision was subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218, and a legal notice of the opportunity to object was published on January 24, 2014, in the Daily Commercial and sent to those who provided comments during the project's development. No objections were filed during the 45-day objection filing period.

Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented any time after the date of signature. This project is estimated to begin in summer of 2014.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact me at the Seminole Ranger District (address listed below).

Mike Herrin

7-15-14

Mike Herrin — Date

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